Gender patterns in 2L1 and L2 English-Spanish bilingual grammars: the Spain-Gibraltar connection

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The internal grammar of DP English-Spanish code-switches have been discussed at two different levels: directionality, which language provides the functional category, the gendered language (i.e. Spanish) (1a) or the ungendered one (i.e. English) (1b); and gender agreement preferences in the case of Spanish determiner switches, where gender double feature valuation could be enforced (i.e. there is agreement between the Spanish determiner and the translation equivalent of the English noun, the so-called Analogical Criterion -AC- (Otheguy & Lapidus 2005)) (2) or not (3) and where gender subspecification could also occur (i.e. the use of masculine as a default option) (4).

How English-Spanish bilinguals produce, interpret or process these switches provides important information concerning the representation of gender features in the mind of different groups of bilinguals (e.g. Cantone & Müller 2008, Liceras et al. 2008, Jorschick et al. 2010, Arnaus et al. 2012, Parafita Couto et al. 2015, Beatty-Martinez & Dussias 2017, Fairchild & van Hell 2017, Valdés Kroff 2017, Burkholder 2018). Dominance has been said to play a role in how gender preferences in (1-4) are shaped and so Spanish-dominant bilinguals have been argued to have a clear-cut preference for [+AC] versus [-AC] constructions (2 vs. 3), while English dominant bilinguals have been shown to use default strategies (4) (Liceras et al. 2016).

In this paper, we investigate how Spanish grammatical gender features are represented in the mind of four groups of bilingual children (Heritage English and L2 English speakers living in Spain; and Heritage Spanish and L2 Spanish speakers living in Gibraltar) by analyzing data elicited via an acceptability judgment task. We address the issue of dominance both by comparing L1 and L2 bilinguals as well as bilinguals from different communities: Spanish-dominant English-Spanish bilinguals in Spain where codeswitching is not a common conversational practice and English-dominant English-Spanish bilinguals in Gibraltar where codeswitching is a habitual communicative practice.

Data analyses show that (i) with respect to directionality, all speakers show a preference for English determiner switches (1b), both Heritage (English: t(29)=5.247, p<.0001; Spanish: t(31)=3.093, p=.004) as well as L2 children (English: t(55)=4.805, p<.0001; Spanish: t(21)=3.117, p=.005). With respect to gender agreement preferences, structures showing a double feature valuation mechanism ([+AC]) are favored by Heritage English (F(1,1)=4.034, p=.054) as well as Heritage Spanish children (F(1,1)=6.140, p=.019). For L2 speakers [+AC] is marginally preferred by L2 English children (F(1,1)=3.111, p=.083) while no such preference appears in L2 Spanish children (F(1,1)=0.149, p=.694). When comparing the two gender agreement strategies (double feature valuation mechanism and the use of default masculine), there is a preference for masculine determiners in the case of Heritage Spanish children (t(31)=2.460, p=.020), but no such preference appears in the case of Heritage English children (t(29)=0.3177=.753). For L2ers there is no preference for either strategy (L2 EN: t(55)=0.139, p=.890; L2 SP: t(21)=1.744, p=.096), although rates are higher for masculine determiners.
These results show that, when processing codeswitches like those in (1-4), the determiner from the ungendered language is preferred by the four child groups, that is, not only by English-dominant but also by Spanish-dominant bilinguals. This implies that not having to deal with the gender features encoded in the functional category is a more economical option for both L1 Spanish and L1 English children. Where enforcing the double gender valuation mechanism is an option, only Heritage speakers prefer this option and, marginally so, English L2 children. Therefore, these speakers and L2 Spanish speakers behave differently. This could be attributed to gender valuation being more rooted in the mind of Spanish-dominant bilinguals as compared to L2 Spanish bilinguals. Furthermore, and in the spirit of Liceras et al. (2016), we argue that dominance is to be interpreted in terms of feature strength so that the dominant language is the language whose features are more grammaticized (i.e. like gender in Spanish), regardless of whether or not, in the case of 2L1 bilinguals, Spanish is their dominant language as per social and input factors.

**Examples**

1. a. la the-fem. house / el the-masc. book
   b. the casa

2. a. la the-fem. house [“house” is feminine in Spanish] [+AC]
   b. el the-masc. book [“plane” is masculine in Spanish] [+AC]

3. a. el the-masc. house [“house” is feminine in Spanish] [-AC]
   b. la the-fem. book [“plane” is masculine in Spanish] [-AC]

4. a. el the-masc. default house
   b. el the-masc. default book

**References**


C.M. Mazak and M.C. Parafita Couto (eds.) *Spanish-English codeswitching in the Caribbean and the U.S.* John Benjamins.

